

New chef at Budmarsh Lodge introduces international tastes, ideas

 By [Gwen Watkins](#)

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Budmarsh Lodge appointed its internationally trained chef, Chris Tustian late last year and already he is encouraging its guests to experience European ideas allied to South African tastes in creating menus that underlie why this boutique hotel in the Magaliesberg so richly deserves its 5-star rating.

Tustian, from the UK town of Banbury, studied in the UK and then rounded off his experience by working in France for 30 months under the guidance of Michelin star-rated chefs before coming to South Africa 18 months ago.

"I started in Franschhoek, at Dish@Le Franschhoek, which was a wonderful introduction to South Africa and then moved to Budmarsh in November 2010. Here I can indulge in my love of herbs, with my own herb garden just outside the kitchen, complemented by herbs grown in the nursery tunnels, alongside the owner, Ken Fargher's prize winning clivias.

"More exciting is the local supplier of micro herbs that allow subtle tastes to permeate food with only the hint of leaf or spray of colour. A beetroot leaf top, provides green and red touches with the full taste of beetroot in a morsel.

"I am very keen to support local suppliers, such as *Food in Mind*, which provides high quality, flash frozen imported fish from Europe, arriving within days of catch and new delicacies for this area, such as rabbit and goose foie gras, which is proving popular."

Long weekend fare

Arriving at Budmarsh it is the green that captures the eye, as the gardens exhibit every shade from oaks to pepper trees, lavender to lemon verbena. The 18-room boutique hotel feels more like a country home, as privacy and quiet infuse the lounge, library and patio, rather than a country inn.

The bedrooms are spacious and there are books in the rooms and scattered throughout the hotel, which along with local art, enhances the feeling of home from home.

The dinner every evening is a set 6-course menu that can be modified for special dietary requirements, such as my allergy to eggs and mushrooms, which it was for our weekend stay.

Menu

- Amuse-bouche - twice baked soufflé
- Starter - Sweet potato & coconut soup; or Carpaccio of Springbok with rocket, parmesan, baby salad and lemon aioli
- Sorbet - fresh fruit
- Main - slow braised pork belly, red wine cabbage, bitter onion puree with pork Café Ole; or pan fried European sea bass, braised fennel, butternut puree with lemon oil; or Mille Feuille of artichoke with wild mushrooms, spinach, and basil pesto veloute
- Dessert - rice pudding with strawberry ice cream and fruit sprinkles; or vanilla Panna Cotta with kiwi sorbet and pawpaw coulis
- Coffee and petit fours

"As a replacement for the soufflé, I served beetroot and orange in balsamic vinegar, we baked the breads without egg and I knew that Panna Cotta is egg free," explained Tustian.

We divided the courses between us. The soufflé was described as meltingly delicious with a hint of cheese and the beetroot and orange was a tangy new taste that could be repeated successfully. The soup was unusual with just a hint of coconut and herbs to lift the sweet potato style vichyssoise. The Carpaccio received its zest from the pastry basket of salad and herbs. The sea bass was excellent moving beyond the blandness of white fish to an outstanding taste and texture not often met in Johannesburg, with the fennel providing a bitter undertone. The pork belly was described as first-rate with the cabbage cutting the richness of the dish. The signature herbs in both main courses added considerably to the taste experience.

The desserts rounded off a superb meal, leaving no space for petit fours! Each course is beautifully served on plain yet elegant china, complementing the excellent crystal and cutlery and we selected the private dining area in the cellar, to add to the fun of the evening.

Sought after and beautifully displayed in an air-conditioned room, the cellar is a gold star Diners' Club collection that shows attention to detail and an excellent knowledge of South African and international red wines.

Wine review

On the wines, Peter Brits, himself a collector, found the cellar tempting and well priced for cellared wines. He discussed his original choice of the Overgaauw Tria Corda 2001 with Marius Badenhorst, the maître d', who suggested that this choice might overwhelm the more subtle taste of the pork and not cut through the richness. He suggested that a Shiraz be a better option for its sharper finish and Hartenberg The Stork 2005 was chosen.

A selected wine from the estate's harvest, the wine was a good vintage, ready and vigorous with excellent fruit, well integrated wood and a long finish, well priced at R450 per bottle. The Graham Beck Brut was recommended for the fish, another excellent choice at R220 per bottle. The meal was rounded off with a complementary glass of Bredell's Late Vintage Port of 1999, a fabulous finish to a gourmet meal.

After a sound night's sleep and a large, scrumptious breakfast, one returns to the city refreshed and revitalised. Budmarsh offers dinner, bed & breakfast at R1210 per person, per night including morning and afternoon tea and cake.

ABOUT GWEN WATKINS

Gwen Watkins is a freelance writer, editor, subeditor and author. Almost 40 years of experience across industrial and commercial writing, as a reporter and PR consultant, has given her expert grounding in brand communication and native advertising. A Master NLP Practitioner, she uses these skills within the creation of copywriting, annual reports, brochures and website copy.

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